

Sermon for August 16th, 2026
ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 4:1-15

1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” **2** And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. **3** In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, **4** and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, **5** but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. **6** The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? **7** If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. **9** Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?” **10** And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. **11** And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. **12** When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.” **13** Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. **14** Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” **15** Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

Psalm 50:7-23

7 “Hear, O my people, and I will speak;
O Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God, your God.

8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

9 I will not accept a bull from your house
or goats from your folds.

10 For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.

11 I know all the birds of the hills,
and all that moves in the field is mine.

12 “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine.

13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?

14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and perform your vows to the Most High,

15 and call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of

disobedience— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Luke 18:9-14

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: **10** “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ **13** But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ **14** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Our text for meditation this Eleventh Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Before Adam and Eve were cast out from the Garden of Eden, God delivered four curses. Eve and all women after her were to experience suffering in childbearing and living a life that revolved around men. The ground was cursed, with Adam and all men being relegated to hard labor all their lives. There was the curse of death as well, which entered into the world from that moment. Yet these three came *after* the curse on the serpent, which contained within it a promise. “The Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.’”¹ One day, a male offspring from the woman would bruise – that is, *crush* – the head of the wicked serpent that tempted man. There would be a *Savior* who comes and undoes all of this suffering forever.

As believers today, we recognize that Jesus is the one promised to destroy the serpent. He bound the devil's power by dying on a Cross for our sins and rising again so that we may be justified. Today, we recognize that what God said to the serpent in Eden was a Gospel promise for us to hold onto. It was the message of hope that Adam and Eve were supposed to cling to as they adjusted to living in a cursed world. When Eve became pregnant, she must have felt all sorts of excitement as the baby started kicking within her womb. She was ignorant of the future arrival of Jesus Christ. So she must have asked, was this son going to be the hero? Was he going to be the savior that was promised? After she gave birth, it seems that she indeed believed that Cain was going to save everyone. I believe this is why Cain was a tiller of the ground. His parents were the ones to raise him up in his vocation, and since the promised seed of the woman would bruise the head of the snake, what better way to find snakes and kill them than to till the ground? So Cain was the farmer, breaking up the soil and planting crops while slaying any serpent he found: perhaps one of them would be the original snake, and then humanity

1 Genesis 3:15

might be allowed to re-enter Eden. Think my friends: *something* motivated Adam to learn how to farm, then to teach his oldest son how to do it, *then* to have this son be the only one of the two brothers to till the soil! This could only be that the man thought Cain was going to be that prophesied hero, just as much as his wife thought so.

The two sons

The resultant favoritism of Adam and Eve on Cain is shown in the names of their sons as well as their vocations. Cain's name means “to get” - as in, Eve *got* Cain by the help of the Lord, just as she exclaimed when he was born. By this name, she thought she was giving something of a prophecy regarding her son. Abel's name on the other hand means “emptiness” or “vanity.”² If Cain was to be the savior as Eve reasoned, then Abel was at best a servant and at worst an unneeded burden. All of their hopes were on Cain, while Abel's status and destiny were considered worthless. The older brother got to embark on a heroic quest of reshaping the land while hunting down a primordial serpentine enemy; Abel the redundancy was left to keep sheep, make clothes, and spin wool for his family. He was relegated to being a servant to everyone else.

We can see why God accepted Abel's offering and not Cain's. Both men made sacrifices but it was Abel who made an offering by faith, not Cain. Abel was raised to be a humble servant to others, and that is just the sort of character God wants to see in men; as he offered up the sheep that he so tenderly raised, God accepted his act of trust.³ Imagine that, a man whose name means “vanity” being considered the brother of *substance* before our Lord! Meanwhile mighty Cain gave his offering not out of love and trust, but out of pride; he already believed that *he* was going to be the one to save humanity, so the offering was merely a formality.

Cain trusted in himself instead of the Lord, and much to his dismay and confusion he was rejected. God wanted the sort of faith that says “You are my Savior so I make this offering,” not the kind of faith that says “*I* am the savior, so I bring this offering.” It is easy to understand though why Cain would be so angry here. Why wouldn't he believe he was the savior? He was named for it, trained for it, tasked with it and hard at work trying to make it happen...but Abel, the *servant boy*, gets credit from God? Behind his anger must have been fear, for this moment brought the foreboding feeling that perhaps it was Abel who was chosen to save instead of him. His mind must have been flooded with the thought that now Abel was not just the less favored brother, but now he was *competition*.

Quite suddenly, as St. John attests, Cain hated Abel.⁴ Abel's deeds were righteous by his faith, while Cain's offering was wicked because he lacked it. God warned him that his sinful nature was trying to inspire heinous deeds, but by that time he had made up his mind. Cain decided to “take out the competition,” and then murdered his brother. The first murder in human history was performed by a man who thought his works justified him, lashing out as he did at someone whom he thought inferior to himself.

The Same Problem Observed in Us

Now, let none of us think that we would never do such a thing ourselves. We have the same capacity for horrible sins as he did. God tells Cain, “sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” My friends, do you rule over the sin that dwells in you? Let us suppose that you do... or at least you *try* to. Every time you try to say no to temptation, you find yourself having to fight something inside of you. The indwelling wickedness of our sinful flesh rises up, cajoles,

² Luther explains it thus in his commentary on Genesis, which may be found for free here:
<https://www.lutheranlibrary.org/356-luther-genesis/>

³ Hebrews 11:4

⁴ 1 John 3:11-15

attacks, tempts, and convinces us to do wrong at every opportunity it gets. Throughout our lives we find ourselves perplexed at this, as though we are our own worst enemy. Even the Apostles found this same dynamic within themselves, unable to completely extinguish the flames of sin in their mortal bodies.⁵

Never tell yourself “I would never do that.” You have the same sort of sin in you that Cain had in his own flesh. The Pharisees told themselves that they would never shed the blood of prophets,⁶ but then they orchestrated the Crucifixion of our Savior – who is not only a Prophet, but God Himself! The ancient Israelites before them promised to never turn from worshiping the true God, yet the Old Testament is replete with examples of them doing just that, over and over and over again. King Saul was a man filled with the Holy Spirit, the pinnacle of righteousness in Israel, but then he found himself on an insane quest to seek out the murder of his former protege David. Every sinner throughout all history, all of us, have had the same problem as Cain did. Unlike Cain though, we Christians are aware of it. Let us not say “I would never do that,” but rather “there but for the Grace of God go I.” Without our Lord's help, we are *all* Cain.

Conclusion

Let us recognize that sinful Cain in our own flesh, and let it be a cause for humility. Let us think like Abel did. Like any man, Abel had his own sins just as we do. Yet Abel approached the Lord in humility and faith, the kind that says “I need you Lord.” He could have used those sheep for anything else, he could have withheld sacrifices from God out of bitterness over being the less favored son, but he did neither of these for he knew that our Lord was the only One who could truly help humanity. Let us *not* be like Cain, who lost everything over his pride and his rage. God cursed him from the ground, forever dashing his hopes of being the snake-slayer his mother wanted him to be. Because we are not immune from committing horrible sins the way he did, let us say to our God “Lord be merciful to me a sinner” and let Him take charge of our destiny. And when we do, He shall not spurn us. After all, remember that Abel offered up the firstborn lamb for his relationship with God. So too was Christ the firstborn Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,⁷ offered up for our sake. While Abel's blood cried out to God for the grievous crime committed on him, Christ submitted to a grievous murder to that His Blood would say to us “you are forgiven.” Believe in Him, and you shall receive a different mark than Cain received – instead you benefit from the sealing of the Holy Spirit given to you in Baptism, granting you eternal life forevermore. With this faith, let us hold on to our Savior, just as righteous Abel.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁵ Romans 7:14-25

⁶ Matthew 23:29-31

⁷ Genesis 22:8, John 1:29